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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the single 2001 issue of a newsletter devoted to identifying and promoting strategies to reduce the poverty rate of young children and to improve the life chances of children still living in poverty. This summer issue features the following articles: (1) "Federal Resources Can Help States Invest in Young Children and Families"; (2) "States Increase Investments in Young Children and Families But Levels of Help Vary Widely"; (3) "States Use Earned Income Credits To Lift Children from Poverty"; (4) "More Employed Families Helped with Child CareBut Demand Outpaces Supply of Subsidies"; and (5) "Screening Is Key to Putting Poor Families on the Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency." Regular sections in each issue of the newsletter include: current activities of the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP); information on recent publications recommended for program administrators and policymakers; and information on publications available from NCCP. (HTH)

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Carole J. Oshinsky, Editor

National Center for Children in Poverty
Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

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News & Issues

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Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

Identifying and promoting strategies to reduce child poverty and to improve the life chances of low-income families

Federal Resources Can Help States Invest in Young Children and Families

by J. Lawrence Aber

In recent years, the federal government has given states more flexibility to implement federal programs and to develop their own state and local initiatives. The 1996 federal welfare overhaul, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and the Child Care and Development Fund are examples of this trend. States now have a stronger and more innovative role in meeting the needs of their low-income families, but that does not mean the federal government is less important. In fact, it is a vital catalyst for state action. This edition of *News & Issues* focuses on some of NCCP's recent research that highlights how states can and do use federal resources and build on successful federal programs to benefit low-income families with children.

Our lead article describes evidence from NCCP's *Map and Track 2000* report that many states are using a combination of state and federal resources to develop new programs and better administrative systems for families with young children. These efforts vary widely from state to state and much more remains to be done, but the report reveals progress and the potential for greater gains in the future.

Another article summarizes the findings from *Untapped Potential: State Earned Income Credits and Child Poverty Reduction*. This latest NCCP Childhood Poverty Research Brief analyzes the current and potential impact of state earned income credits (EICs) on child poverty levels and finds that as many as one million children could be lifted from poverty by state EICs modeled after the federal one. Ten states had refundable EICs in the 2000 tax year, and many of those states recently enacted or expanded their EIC programs.

NCCP also worked with Abt Associates to conduct the National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families. A state and community substudy examined how states are using increased federal child care subsidies to help low-income families enter or remain in the workforce. Data gathered from 17 states illustrate large increases in spending for child care but also show that on average only 12–20 percent of eligible children are receiving the subsidies. Evidence is mounting that the need for child care subsidies is outpacing their availability.

And increasingly, states need better management information systems and screening techniques to identify and help vulnerable families obtain services that will help them to work and achieve economic self-sufficiency. NCCP Research Forum staff offer suggestions on how federal action in bringing the experts together, as well as providing financial incentives, could play a major role in the success of TANF.

Depression in Low-Income Women see page 9

These NCCP studies reveal a clear pattern. While many states are investing more resources in young children and families and creatively using federal resources, there is considerable cross-state variation in state choices about the use of state dollars, targeted federal dollars, and TANF dollars. In a changing economic context, tracking and monitoring state and federal spending on children and low-income families is of critical importance for both advocates and policymakers. We welcome your comments on the NCCP work described in this newsletter. ■

States Increase Investments in Young Children and Families—But Levels of Help Vary Widely

States have substantially increased their spending on child development and family support efforts targeting children under age six and their families over the last two years. They are also making more efforts to promote family economic security. But these efforts are extraordinarily uneven, despite the incentive of federal policies that provide much of the framework within which states make their own investments.

These findings continue a pattern tracked by the National Center for Children in Poverty since 1996 in its *Map and Track* series. The third edition of *State Initiatives for Young Children and Families* was released in December 2000.

Striking Facts and Figures

"*Map and Track 2000* indicates that states increased their investments in child development and family support programs and early childhood systems development efforts by nearly 90 percent since the 1998 report, spending over $3.7 billion in fiscal year 2000," explains Dr. Nancy Cauthen, the report's lead author and NCCP senior policy analyst. These state-level investments include home visiting programs for new parents, ongoing family support for high-risk families with young children, prekindergarten services, and family resource centers, as well as systems-level efforts to improve early childhood service delivery.

"The theme first sounded in *Map and Track 1996*—What a Difference a State Makes—resonates even more strongly today," says NCCP's Deputy Director Dr. Jane Knitzer, who is also co-author of the report.

"Although the growth in overall spending is significant, variation across the states is considerable," says Dr. Knitzer. Six states report spending more than $200 per child under age six for child development and family support efforts, while 14 states spend $20 or less. Five states do not invest any state funds. (See table.)

"The report shows that states are increasingly recognizing the importance of investing in infancy and toddlerhood," says Dr. Knitzer. Thirty-one states now invest in programs for infants and toddlers, compared to only 18 states in 1996. "At the same time," notes Dr. Knitzer, "overall investment in infants and toddlers is comparatively low—it accounts for less than 10 percent of total reported spending on child development and family support programs for children under age six."

Dr. Cauthen expresses concern that while state investments in prekindergarten continue to grow—a total of 43 states now support prekindergarten services—these programs face several major challenges. "Efforts to expand prekindergarten—both in terms of serving more children and offering full- or extended-day services—are complicated by competition for resources with subsidized child care and efforts to expand kindergarten to full-day," she explains. "Also, despite the recent emphasis on school readiness, we found only limited state efforts to prepare children for the transition to kindergarten."

Variable Economic Efforts

Because poverty is a principal threat to the healthy development and school readiness of young children, *Map and Track 2000* charts state efforts to help families achieve economic security by: (1) increasing family income and (2) ensuring that families have access to basic services, such as child care and health care. Here again, state efforts vary dramatically.

"Only a minority of states are using income tax and minimum wage policies to increase family incomes," says Dr. Cauthen. Of the 42 states that tax personal income, 20 states tax a single-parent family of three living below the federal poverty level. Only 10 states offer refundable earned income credits (typically modeled on the federal Earned Income Tax Credit), and only eight states offer refundable credits for child care expenses. At the same

Per capita state spending on child development and family support efforts, fiscal year 2000

Dollars spent per child under age 6				
More than $200* [6]	Between $100 and $200 [14]	Between $20 and $100** [16]	Between $0 and $20 [9]	No funds [5]
California District of Columbia Georgia Massachusetts North Carolina Oklahoma	Alaska Connecticut Delaware Florida Illinois Kentucky Minnesota Missouri Ohio Oregon Rhode Island South Carolina Texas Wisconsin	Arizona Arkansas Colorado Hawaii Indiana Iowa Kansas Maine Maryland Michigan New Mexico New York Vermont Virginia Washington West Virginia	Idaho Louisiana Montana Nebraska Nevada New Hampshire North Dakota Pennsylvania Tennessee	Alabama Mississippi South Dakota Utah Wyoming

* Although New Jersey's spending fell above $200 per child under age 6, it is not included because the state's funding figures include a substantial amount of kindergarten spending.

** No state in this category spent less than $40 per child under age 6.

time, only 11 states have enacted a minimum wage that exceeds the federal minimum of $5.15 per hour; the highest in 2000 was $6.50 per hour.

State efforts to ensure access to subsidized child care and health insurance for children as well as parents are also uneven, points out Dr. Cauthen. Nationally, only 12 percent of children who are potentially eligible for child care subsidies through the Child Care and Development Fund actually receive benefits, ranging from 3 to 25 percent across the states. Maximum income eligibility levels vary from $17,000 to $40,000. (See article on child care for low-income families on page 6.) Thirty-three states set the Medicaid/CHIP (the state Children's Health Insurance Program) income eligibility level for children under age six at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty level, but only two states provide health insurance for parents at the 200 percent level, and 10 states set parental eligibility for Medicaid at or below the poverty level, while 18 states set it at or below 50 percent of the poverty level.

Discussion about the importance of family economic security is largely missing from program and policy efforts to enhance the development and school readiness of young children. "One of our most critical findings is that although child poverty is widely acknowledged to threaten positive outcomes for young children, policy efforts to help working parents achieve and maintain economic security for their families are largely disconnected from child development and family support efforts," comments Dr. Cauthen.

States funding prekindergarten through state programs and Head Start supplements, fiscal year 2000

State program and Head Start supplement [18]	State program only [21]	Head Start supplement only [4]	Funds no prekindergarten [8]
Connecticut	Arizona*	Alaska	Alabama
District of Columbia	Arkansas*	Idaho	Indiana
Georgia	California	New Hampshire	Mississippi
Hawaii	Colorado	North Dakota	Montana
Kansas	Delaware		Pennsylvania**
Maine	Florida		South Dakota
Maryland	Illinois*		Utah
Massachusetts	Iowa		Wyoming
Minnesota*	Kentucky		
New Jersey*	Louisiana		
New Mexico*	Michigan		
North Carolina*	Missouri		
Ohio	Nebraska*		
Oklahoma	Nevada		
Rhode Island*	New York		
Texas	Oregon		
Washington	South Carolina		
Wisconsin	Tennessee		
	Vermont		
	Virginia		
	West Virginia		

* State allocates funds to localities that may be used for prekindergarten but that may also be used for other services for young children.

** Pennsylvania allows school districts to use aid provided for grades K–12 to serve 4-year-olds in kindergarten programs.

Although child poverty is widely acknowledged to threaten positive outcomes for young children, policy efforts to help working parents achieve and maintain economic security for their families are largely disconnected from child development and family support efforts.

Challenges for the Future

The findings reported in *Map and Track 2000* suggest several routes to improve outcomes for young children:

- *Advocates and policymakers need to pay attention to state-by-state differences.* Levels of state investments in child development and family support vary considerably, even among states with similar levels of child poverty and family economic security resources. This raises an important question, says Dr. Knitzer: "What would it take to move the states that are investing the least in young children closer to the states that are investing the most?"
- *Choices states make in implementing federal policies are critical to young children's well-being.* "Although state agendas for young children are vitally important, federal policies provide much of the framework within which states make their own investments," says Dr. Cauthen. Sometimes this takes the form of state supplements to federal child development and family support programs; sometimes federal policies provide the backbone of what states offer in terms of basic supports such as child care and health care. For example, state eligibility levels for health insurance for young children are considerably higher than those reported in the 1998 edition of *Map and Track* because of federal enactment of CHIP.
- *States still need to be convinced of the case for strategic investments in early childhood.* Despite growth in individual programs, only a few states have developed and implemented a statewide vision for early childhood. Only a handful of states report gubernatorial interest in these issues, and many states report difficulty convincing legislators of the need to invest in young children. Only 11 states explicitly dedicate funds for early childhood systems development. "This poses a clear challenge to continued strategic investments," says Dr. Knitzer.

"Years of economic prosperity for most of the states have helped shape the increase in commitments to young children. The challenge will be to sustain the gains and improve upon them when the economic climate is not so promising. *Map and Track 2000* shows that there is much on which to build. But it also suggests that the gains for young children are vulnerable to changing political and economic circumstances," Dr. Knitzer concludes. ■

States Use Earned Income Credits to Lift Children from Poverty

According to a new study by NCCP, over one million children could be lifted from poverty by state earned income tax credits (EICs) for low-income working families. Currently, about 20 million working families receive an average of $1,500 each from the federal earned income tax credit and it lifts 2.5 million children from poverty. The NCCP study: *Untapped Potential: State Earned Income Credits and Child Poverty Reduction*, illustrates the value of expanding this proven federal program at the state level, says Dr. Lawrence Aber, NCCP's director.

As evidence mounts showing the effectiveness of the federal EIC as an anti-poverty tool, a growing number of states have enacted or expanded state earned income credits that build on the federal credit. Almost one-third of the states and the District of Columbia have their own earned income credit tax policies.

Current Impact of State Earned Income Credits

Minnesota, Vermont, New York, and Wisconsin all have refundable state EICs that reduce the poverty gap—the distance between family income and the poverty line—by a range of 6 to 9 percent. The refundable credits in these states range from 22.5 percent to over 40 percent of the federal credit for some families.

"State earned income credits have the largest effect on family income in states where the credit is refundable and set at a significant percentage of the federal credit," explains Dr. Hsien-Hen Lu, an assistant professor of public health at Columbia University and a co-author of the report. "Refundable credits provide families with additional income beyond the amount of their state income tax liabilities to help offset sales and other taxes," he points out.

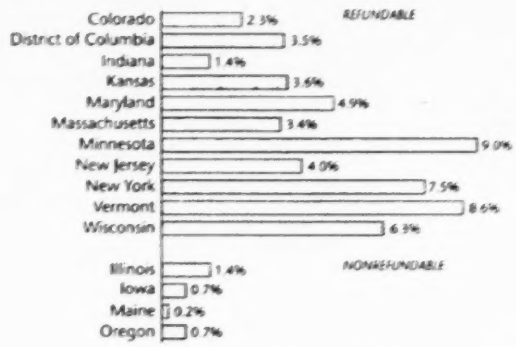
Potential Impact of State Earned Income Credits

If each of the 12 most populous states had a refundable state earned income credit set at 50 percent of the federal credit, over 700,000 children would no longer live in poor families, says Dr. Neil G. Bennett, a co-author of the report and NCCP's senior advisor for demographic research and analysis.

"State EICs are already making a significant difference in the lives of working families in many states, but they could do much more. Only two of the 12 most populous states now have refundable EICs, so there is tremendous opportunity to lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty through enactment of EICs in these states." says Dr. Bennett. If just two states, Texas and California, enacted refundable state earned income credits set at half the federal credit, over 300,000 children would be lifted from poverty. If Florida had such a program and New York raised its credit level, about 70,000 children in each state would be lifted out of poverty.

How State EICs Help Close the Poverty Gap

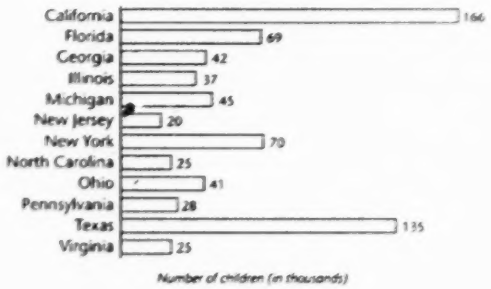
Percentage increase in income-to-needs ratio towards the poverty line due to state EICs, for children under age 18 in families with at least one employed parent



Note: Rhode Island also has a nonrefundable EIC, but its precise impact cannot be determined from data in the March Current Population Survey.

State EICs' Potential to Benefit Many More Children

Number of children under age 18 with at least one employed parent potentially lifted out of poverty due to state EICs in 12 largest states, pegged at 50 percent of the federal credit



Refundability is Key to Success of EICs

"One of our key findings in this study is that refundable earned income credits have much more impact than nonrefundable ones," says Dr. Lu. The nine states and the District of Columbia that have refundable credits ranging from 10 to 43 percent of the federal credit all narrow their poverty gaps substantially more than the states that have nonrefundable credits.

Nationally, NCCP found that state refundable credits set at half of the federal credit in all 50 states would help 1.147 million children out of poverty, while nonrefundable credits at the same level would help only 135,000 children rise above poverty.

The Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
Nearly 20 million working families benefit from the EITC each year, receiving an average of about $1,500 per family. The maximum credit in 2000 was $2,353 for families with one child and $3,888 for families with two or more children. Families with two or more children received a credit of 40 cents for each dollar earned up to $9,720 in 2000. For earnings between $12,960 and $31,152 that rate of 40 cents on the dollar gradually phases down to zero. Eligibility levels and benefits are annually adjusted for inflation.

Recent changes in federal tax law affecting credits for low-income families with children
About 10 million children in low-income families will receive no benefits from the major tax reduction signed into law by President Bush on June 7, but a projected 15–17 million low-income children will benefit from the legislation. In addition to creating a partially refundable child tax credit, the new tax law also enhances the EITC. The 2001 tax-cut legislation:

- Provides "marriage penalty" relief for low-income couples by increasing the income threshold at which married couples can receive the maximum tax credit, starting in 2002. Currently, EITC benefits begin to phase down for earnings above $13,090, but starting in 2002 couples will be able to claim the maximum credit of about $4,000 on earnings up to $14,090. By 2008, couples will be able to claim the maximum credit on earnings up to $16,090. When fully phased-in, this change will increase the value of the EITC by as much as $632 per year.
- Establishes a partially refundable child tax credit of up to $600 per child in 2001, rising in stages to $1000 per child by 2010. This credit is limited to children in families with incomes over $10,000 per year. For tax years 2001–2004, the size of the credit is 10 percent of the amount by which a family's income exceeds $10,000. For example, a family earning $15,000 would receive a $500 credit. ($5,000 x 10 percent = $500.) After 2005, the size of the credit will increase to 15 percent of family income over $10,000.

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Why State EICs Are Important

Refundable state EICs offer several benefits for states, families, and children, says Julian Palmer, editor of the study and NCCP's director for communications. In addition to reducing child poverty rates, state EICs can help to:

- *Support welfare reform* by rewarding work and increasing take-home pay for parents making the transition from welfare to sustained employment.
- *Provide significant tax relief* to low-income working families during an economic slowdown.
- *Raise parental employment levels, lift family income, and improve school achievement* for elementary school- and preschool-age children, according to new evaluations of welfare reform programs that include employment-based fiscal incentives like the EIC.

The full report and more information about child poverty and related topics are available at the NCCP Web site: <www.nccp.org>. A detailed description of the structure and income thresholds for the federal EIC is included in the report. ■

NCCP Expands Mission to All Children, Low-Income Families

All children deserve an equal opportunity to succeed in life, and poverty prevents too many of them from having a fair chance.

NCCP's mission now includes identifying and promoting strategies that prevent poverty and improve the lives of children up to age 18 in the United States. The Governing Committee of NCCP approved this expansion of NCCP's mission beyond the original focus on children under age six at its spring meeting.

The Center will continue to place special emphasis on preventing and alleviating poverty among young children because poverty early in life poses particularly serious risks to children's healthy growth and development. NCCP takes this step in recognition that all children deserve an equal opportunity to succeed in life, and poverty prevents too many of them from having a fair chance.

At the same time, NCCP is expanding its mission from families living in poverty to include all low-income families, especially those whose incomes are just above the poverty line and only one missed paycheck away from falling into poverty. Many "near-poor" families share similar problems with their poorer neighbors—lack of health insurance; difficulty in obtaining affordable, sustainable, and quality child care; need for more education and training; inadequate housing and transportation; family behavioral and social issues such as domestic violence, depression, and substance abuse; and high-crime neighborhoods with few family supports.

NCCP continues to emphasize in-depth research on state policies as well as how federal policies and programs are implemented on the state and local level. NCCP appreciates that low-income children and families are diverse, as are the communities and states in which they live. There is no single solution to child poverty. Both the public and private sectors have important roles to play in reducing child poverty and investing in families. This includes the federal and state governments, local communities, and individual families themselves.

To learn more about NCCP, visit our Web site at <www.nccp.org> and click on "About the Center." ■

More Employed Families Helped with Child Care —But Demand Outpaces Supply of Subsidies

State spending on child care grew dramatically in the years since welfare reform legislation was enacted in 1996, but the majority of children needing child care subsidies are not receiving them. This is the main finding of the National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families state and community substudy released in late 2000 by Abt Associates Inc. and the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP).

When Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act—which established the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and increased federal investments in child care subsidies to help families leave the welfare rolls, as well as other low-income families, many of whom had never received cash assistance—a sense of optimism prevailed about increasing the child care available, says Ann Collins, NCCP director for Program and Policy Analysis.

In addition to providing states with increased funding and flexibility for child care programs, the legislation replaced the previous federal cash entitlement with a block grant program (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF) and, among other things, made benefits and services contingent upon meeting a work requirement and made families subject to a maximum time limit of five years to receive TANF cash assistance. States would have new flexibility to use TANF funds for a variety of purposes, including for child care subsidies.

"We were hopeful, but we wanted to document what would happen in this new era," Collins says, to explain why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services commissioned the study. "We designed the study to examine how states and communities implement policies and programs to meet the child care needs of families moving from welfare to work. We also wanted to know how other low-income families were faring with their child care needs, how policies change over time, and how the relationships between these policies and other factors affect the type, amount, and cost of care in communities." In addition, says Collins, "we investigated the factors that shape child care decisions in these families, and the role child care subsidies play.

Information for the study was collected in 25 counties in 17 states selected to represent relatively low-income communities. The research team drew on administrative records and financial data, as well as interviews with state and community policymakers and child care experts in the summer of 1999.

Most Eligible Children Not Served

"When we started to analyze the information we collected for the state and community aspect of the study, we found that the median increase in spending for the 16 states providing financial information was 78 percent, but that the vast majority of children who were potentially eligible for child care subsidies did not receive them," notes Collins. On average, the states in the study served only 15 to 20 percent of children who would be eligible for subsidies if states adopted the maximum federal CCDF eligibility guideline, and no state served more than 25 percent.

"We saw that, in addition to federal CCDF, TANF funds were a very significant source of funding for the expansion in child care subsidies. In 1997, only three of the 16 states were using TANF funds for child care. In 1999, all 16 states did so. In 1997, just one state drew more than 20 percent of child care expenditures from the TANF block grant. In 1999, 12 states did so."

With these additional funds, states were able to serve many more children. Twelve of the 15 states reporting usage data experienced more than a 30 percent growth in the number of children receiving subsidies. "We found most of the growth, in most of the states, is accounted for by families who left TANF or who never received it," explains Collins. "Children from these families are the strong majority of children who are served by child care subsidies."

"Our study reveals that states are able to meet fully the demand for child care subsidies from families receiving TANF; unmet demand comes from families who do not receive TANF," emphasizes Collins. She describes how, in the initial years, the tremendous growth in funding and subsidy use strained many states' administrative capacities and systems. In most states, however, many of these issues were being resolved in the spring and summer of 1999.

The study provides many details about subsidy policies and delivery systems and the types of care supported by subsidies. It also gives information about the use of quality funds and general issues with the supply of care available in communities.

Waiting Lists Continue

While the study did not attempt to quantify the demand for child care subsidies, it did reveal evidence that even with the tremendous growth, there was still more demand for subsidies than could be met by current funding levels. "In 1999, in those states that made a commitment, either formally or informally, to serve every eligible family that requested services," points out Collins, "there were no strong signs that the numbers requesting services were leveling off. In the majority of the remaining states, there were waiting lists for subsidies."

"The report makes clear that a federal program—the CCDF—provides many low-income, employed families with basic assistance to help them pay for child care,"

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Screening is Key to Putting Poor Families on the Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency

States will need to use sophisticated information systems and screening techniques to manage the diverse group of families making up the cash assistance caseload as welfare reform approaches its five-year time limit, and federal resources should play a role in these activities. This is the conclusion of NCCP's Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism, which has been tracking the effects of welfare changes on the well-being of children and families for the last three years through its online database describing large-scale studies of welfare programs (www.researchforum.org).

The sweeping reforms enacted by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 are raising increasing concern about whether TANF caseloads are becoming "harder-to-serve" (more difficult to employ). The act set federal mandates for work requirements, fiscal sanctions, and a five-year lifetime time limit for receipt of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (the block grant to the states that replaced the federal program Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC). Barriers to employment range from limited educational backgrounds and little or no work experience, to hidden barriers and disabilities such as mental and physical health challenges, alcohol and other substance abuse problems, and the consequences of domestic violence. In addition, many families who have left the TANF caseloads are not employed and may be struggling with similar barriers.

A consensus is being reached that these vulnerable families will be a higher priority in the next phase of federal and state welfare reform activities, says Dr. John Lanigan, the Research Forum's deputy director. "TANF caseloads still appear to be a heterogeneous group, with the stock-and-flow including the least job ready, new entrants, recyclers, and long-term stayers—who are generally more disadvantaged," he adds. An increasing proportion of each state's TANF caseload must now be engaged in work activities under the federal program rules, he says, and states now face a new sense of urgency to undertake the task of preparing these groups for employment. State and local welfare reform initiatives will carry the burden of moving TANF recipients with multiple barriers or disabilities to employment within the five-year time limit.

Screening is Major Tool

Some states and localities have already taken up this challenge. They have been screening or assessing TANF recipients for unobserved barriers even though the tools have not been widely studied. "This is one area that needs more research," says Barbara Blum, director of the Research Forum. She suggests that federal incentives would help get states to think more about what screening and assessment tools to use with these vulnerable families. A March report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services lays out 10 important questions welfare agencies and their partners should consider when choosing screening and assessment tools for TANF clients who may have unobserved barriers to employment.

Only if states continue to improve their use of information and information systems will the early successes of TANF rise to the next level. The federal government can be a key player in providing the states with incentives to do this.

Screening activities can help program administrators provide needed services to multi-problem families. They also provide other benefits, suggests Dr. Lanigan. Screening and assessing TANF recipients for barriers to employment:

- Encourages states and localities to look at their front-line worker staffing capacity and skill levels to identify limitations.
- Helps state and local service delivery systems to make appropriate prevention and treatment referrals.
- Encourages states to evaluate the ability of their management information systems (MIS) to track multi-problem TANF families as they address multiple barriers, remove barriers, and move into employment in a timely way.

Update Information Systems

The federal government could promote state and local use of MIS systems and appropriate screening tools through fiscal incentives or by earmarking a portion of TANF block grant funds, suggests Dr. Lanigan. Such incentives could also be applied to develop state and local systems of services and partnering plans, as well as to improve MIS capacity to track TANF recipients as they overcome their barriers to work and meet or fail to meet time limits.

Two recent studies commissioned by federal government departments—and fueled by concerns raised in Senate and House committees overseeing TANF—examine the capability of automated state MIS to provide the information needed by state and local officials to help low-income families with children obtain and retain employment and become economically independent.

One report from the U.S. General Accounting Office, *Welfare Reform: Improving State Automated Systems Requires Coordinated Federal Effort* (GAO-HEHS-00-48), found that better MIS would help ensure that TANF goals and requirements would be met and that states and localities would be better positioned to meet the

(continued on page 8)

More Employed Families Helped (continued from page 6)

says NCCP's Director, Dr. J. Lawrence Aber. "States recognize the importance of this core support for families, and they use a significant proportion of their TANF funds to make subsidies even more available to low-income families."

Dr. Aber is concerned that reliance on TANF funds in the future will create potential problems as the economy changes. "Future TANF levels may be lower than current levels, and a recession could result in higher TANF caseloads. Singly, or in combination, these events are likely to reduce the amount of TANF funds available for child care and other support services to enable low-income families to work and become self-sufficient," he cautions.

The full report, *National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families: State and Community Substudy, Interim Report*, is available on the Abt Associates Web site at <http://www.abtassoc.com/reports/welfare-download/NSCCLIF.pdf>. Future reports are planned. ■

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Screening is Key to Putting Poor Families on the Road (continued from page 7)

new accountability demands of TANF that accompany the greater state and local flexibility in TANF implementation. "Many of the obstacles states face may be best addressed at the state level," says Dr. Lanigan. "However, coordinated federal action would help to improve automated systems serving social programs."

Federal Action is Needed

Presently, no group or organization formally brings together the array of federal agencies and their fragmented categorical programs involved in welfare reform to help states use MIS effectively for TANF clients and struggling low-income families. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services could play a pivotal role in orchestrating such a broad-based collaborative approach, says Dr. Lanigan. He explains that current MIS operations have "major limitations" in three key areas: (1) case managers lack information about what services are being provided and how to respond quickly when problems arise; (2) states and localities find it difficult to obtain information for planning service delivery strategies; and (3) states and localities lack program oversight information, especially to support enforcement of the five-year TANF time limit and to monitor the employment progress of TANF recipients.

Federal actions could eliminate these shortcomings in state automated systems by:

- Disseminating information on best practices of MIS in supporting welfare reform.
- Reviewing and modifying the federal process for systems procurement.
- Facilitating links among the automated systems used by different state and local agencies through demonstration projects.
- Facilitate states' access to cross-state information to enable comprehensive enforcement of the five-year time limit.

A report from the State Information Technology Consortium reinforces the need for modern welfare MIS. It argues that the transition of the nation's human services programs from income maintenance to self-sufficiency requires a "systemwide paradigm shift" in culture, processes, procedures, and information. It identifies current state government information systems as the main barrier. "These systems are outdated, have limited functions and database capacity, and cannot be changed easily," explains Dr. Lanigan.

"This study tells us that the movement to update state information systems to support TANF is still in its early stages," says Barbara Blum. "Only if states continue to improve their use of information and information systems," she concludes, "will the early successes of TANF rise to the next level. The federal government can be a key player in providing the states with incentives to do this." ■

Center News Briefs

NCCP Research Updates

- Low-income women are almost twice as likely as those from higher-income groups to suffer from depression, and one quarter to more than half of all women receiving public assistance have high levels of depressive symptoms. Yet while effective treatments are known, this problem remains largely mistreated or untreated, especially among individuals with low incomes. These are some of the findings of a literature review released in April by NCCP's Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism. *Depression and Low-Income Women: Challenges for TANF and Welfare-to-Work Policies and Program* summarizes what is known about the prevalence, treatment, and consequences of depression in low-income women, especially the relationship of maternal depression to welfare and employment and the consequences for children. It offers implications for research, policy, and programs. The full report and research citations are available at <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/dltanf.html> or on the Research Forum Web site at <www.researchforum.org>. A printed executive summary is free from NCCP.

- *Kith and Kin—Informal Child Care: Highlights from Recent Research*, published in May by NCCP, summarizes what is known about informal child care—care by relatives, friends, and neighbors—the type of care used by a significant proportion of employed mothers with children under age five. A good deal is known about the proportion of children using such care and trends over time, the characteristics of the families, why this type of child care is used, the costs, who the providers are, how quality could be improved, the relationships among the providers, and the parents and children they serve. The report is available at <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/kithkin.html>. A printed copy cost: $10.

- The Research Forum Web site <www.researchforum.org> now provides abstracts of reviewed research projects in its online database. The abstracts contain concise project descriptions and recent findings to provide users with quick access to relevant information. The database key topics section will soon summarize recent findings about each subject, outstanding questions to be answered, resources for further information, and recommended publications.

- A number of guest speakers have updated NCCP staff on their research in the least few months. (1) Council of Advisor member **Donald Hernandez**, professor at the Department of Sociology and Center for Social Demographic Analysis, State University of New York at Albany, described children in immigrant families—who make up one-fifth of all children—and explained why there is no typical immigrant child. (2) Former NCCP policy analyst on services integration **Ajay Chaudry** described his Harvard University Ph.D. dissertation project that analyzes child care arrangements in two low-income neighborhoods of New York City and looks at the two-generation survival strategies of low-income urban families in negotiating their work lives and children's development. (3) **Dr. Fred Wulczyn** of Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, described how an online information system based on administrative data that reveals the volume and capacity of foster care sites is beginning to transform child welfare services for the New York City Administration for Children's Services.

NCCP Staff Updates

- The Center is pleased to announce the promotion of **Ann Collins** to director for Program and Policy Analysis. Since joining NCCP in 1995, she has played a major leadership role in crafting NCCP's agenda in early care and education, shaping the Center's efforts to address children's needs in the context of welfare reform, and working closely with the deputy director on cross-disciplinary projects. She will help shape the Center's research agenda on child care, family economic security, and child development. She will continue to co-direct the five-year national study of low-income child care, which is conducted jointly with Abt Associates, and lead in stimulating new thinking and activities to improve informal child care. Her Master's degree in public affairs is from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

- **Steven Goldberg**, first director of development for NCCP, is overseeing the Center's five-year $12 million endowment campaign, begun in 2001, and is fundraising for NCCP's LIFT (Let's Invest in Families Today) initiative. (LIFT will be featured in the fall *News & Issues*.) A lawyer by training, he has almost two decades of development experience at university and community organizations. At the New York City Partnership, he directed fundraising for projects on school reform, welfare-to-work, and subsidized housing.

- Since joining NCCP in January, **Dr. Lauren Appelbaum** has developed a database of surveys and polls on attitudes toward the poor; she is also creating a poverty questionnaire for a national survey. Her Ph.D. is in social psychology from Yale University where she specialized in political psychology. Her Master's from Yale and Bachelor's from New York University are also in psychology. She received post-doctoral training in attitudinal research at the Free University of Berlin and worked at Temple University on the NICHD Study of Early Child Care.

(continued on page 11)

Publications of Note

This column highlights recent publications recommended for program administrators and policymakers by the Center's program staff and librarian. ***Documents should be ordered directly from the publishers listed.***

☐ **From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development,** edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips. The product of a 2.5 year collaboration of leading authorities in early childhood development, this book synthesizes the knowledge and insights into an integrated science around four themes: (1) children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn; (2) early environments and nurturing relationships matter; (3) society is not meeting the needs of young children; and (4) interactions among early childhood science, policy, and practice demand dramatic rethinking. Fundamental issues include rethinking nature vs. nurture, effects of culture, children's relationships with others, families' economic status as it affects their children, and political influences on children's programs. Policy and practice recommendations include: (1) translating the knowledge base on young children's emotional, regulatory, and social development into effective strategies to foster the development of learning skills, ability to work with others and resolve conflicts, and the capacity to experience feeling competent and loved; (2) linking school readiness to reducing disparities among children of varying backgrounds at school entry; (3) addressing children's mental health; (4) increasing efforts to reduce the risks of chronic mental health problems, substance abuse, and family violence; and (5) funding initiatives and benefits for children's nonparental caregivers. The report calls for national leaders to address the entire spectrum of public investments in child care and early education and to revise the nation's tax, wage, and income policies to prevent long-term poverty for children and their families. Agencies and foundations should lead in documenting and encouraging further investigation of effective strategies. State and local decisionmakers need to reduce the fragmentation of early childhood policies and programs. The report argues for a new national dialogue to reassess the idea of shared responsibility and strategic investment in young children and their families. (2000, 612 pp.; $39.95; online order 20 percent discount, electronic version free).
National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20055; (888) 624-8373 or (202) 334-3313/ Fax: (202) 334-2451/ Web: http://books.nap.edu/nap-cgi/newsrch.cgi?term=Neurons/E-mail: zjones@nas.edu.

☐ **KIDS COUNT data book: State profiles of child well-being,** by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The new edition of this chartbook reveals that the last decade registered the largest increase in the number of children in the United States since the 1950s, due in large part to immigration. The well-being of children improved on seven of the 10 measures tracked in this annual report. While most states saw improvements in the indicators, the report emphasizes that 16 million children still live in low-income working families struggling to make ends meet and that the share of children living in single-parent families, which stood at nearly 28 percent in 2000, has increased. Decreases are noted in the infant mortality rate, child and teen death rates, and high school dropout rate, and the child poverty rate fell to 16.9 percent from a decade high of 22.7 percent in 1993. In addition, there has been a steady decline in the rate of teenage births, which dropped from 37 per 1,000 teens in 1990 to 30 per 1,000 teens in 1998. At the same time, the rate of low-weight births has increased. (2001,184 pp.: free)
Annie E. Casey Foundation, Attn: KIDS COUNT data book, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202; (410) 223-2890/Fax (410) 337-8539/Web: http://www.aecf.org/kc1998/toc.htm

☐ **Partnering for success: Community approaches to early learning: A report on partnerships in low-income communities,** by Susan Ochshorn. This report focuses on how communities can meet the needs of young children and their families living in poverty by stimulating school reform and creating learning communities. It emphasizes the importance of early childhood programs that connect with families and public schools. Forty-two states have adopted various types of preschool programs. The impetus for their activities comes from existing child care programs, therapeutic and child development centers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, parent groups, elementary schools, community colleges, school districts, family support centers, health and social service agencies, business organizations, civic and religious groups, and foundations. Six programs are profiled in depth; 68 are described in brief. Several conclusions can be drawn across program initiatives: (1) changing beliefs and motivation is as important and challenging as acquiring money; (2) partnerships between schools and early childhood programs promote good quality child care and positive school experiences; and (3) 84 percent of the programs included in the partnership inventory report higher levels of performance in elementary school. Successful partnerships encourage superintendents of school districts to adopt collaborative early childhood efforts to propel educational reform and universal prekindergarten; consider the needs of working parents; and promote awareness of effective programs to other community-based early childhood organizations so they will, in turn, adopt similar programs. (2000, 60 pp.: free)
Child Care Action Campaign, 330 Seventh Ave, 14th floor, New York, NY 10001; (212) 239-0138/Fax: (212) 268-6515/Web: www.childcareaction.org/E-mail: info@childcareaction.org

☐ **Poverty knowledge: Social science, social policy, and the poor in twentieth-century U.S. history,** by Alice O'Connor. This book provides a detailed account of the history of how poverty research, knowledge, and policy has changed and impacts how the problem has been dealt with. Social investigators during the Progressive Era of the 1890s, says the author, tended to characterize poverty in terms of income, wages, and employment while attributing the source of poverty to the economic and institutional relationships of industrial capitalism. These researchers focused on industrial democracy, reform, and organizing trade unions as vehicles to reduce poverty. In the post-war period, she says, researchers defined poverty in similar terms, but attributed it to a different source—the inadequacies of poor people themselves. After the War on Poverty, researchers focused on deciphering the dynamics of poverty and the attributes of poor people, using quantitative, national-level data. The author contends that the way the poverty problem is viewed must change if poverty is going to be eliminated. She

argues that current social science poverty knowledge is primarily concerned with characterizing poor people, their behavior, and their welfare status. There has been tension, she says, between individual- and societal-level solutions to poverty. She suggests that poverty knowledge reflects the institutional politics of inequality among research organizations, social policy "intermediaries," and poor individuals, and that researchers are too dependent on government contracts. Objective poverty knowledge has been used more often to limit assistance to the poor than improve their lives, to disassociate the working poor from the working class, and to focus reforms on welfare instead of on problems with the economy and work. Objective poverty knowledge, she says, has been used successfully most recently by the conservative right to alter the terms of the debate, while previously a liberal hegemony prevailed. What is needed, she says, is to investigate the political economy and culture of capitalism, to consider knowledge learned from direct action and everyday experience, and to recognize that our view of poverty knowledge is rooted in ideology and is not neutral. (2001; 392 pp.; $29.95)
Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, (609) 258-4900/ Fax (609) 258-6305.

- **Pulling apart: A state-by-state analysis of income trends,** by Jared Bernstein, Elizabeth C. McNichol, Lawrence Mishel, and Robert Zahradnik. This report examines long-term and recent state-by-state trends in income inequality between 1970 and the late 1990s. The authors note that a significant increase in income inequality occurred in the 1980s and developed further in the 1990s. Within the last three years, wages have risen greatly for workers at all levels, but this increase has not been enough to off-set stagnant and declining wages for those with low to middle incomes. In all but four states, the income disparity between the top 20 percent and the lowest 20 percent is wider than it was two decades ago. The decline in the incomes of the poorest families reached highs of 10 percent with four states reaching 20 percent since 1970. At the same time, wages for the highest paid employees continue to grow rapidly. Factors contributing to this income divide include globalization, shrinking supply of manufacturing jobs and expansion of low-wage service jobs, immigration, and fewer and weaker labor unions. The authors say policymakers can help by raising the $5.15 an hour minimum wage, whose value is lower than it was from 1961 to 1984. Strengthening state and national unemployment insurance systems can help those dealing with periods of unemployment avoid falling into poverty. Reforming state tax systems progressively, including not taxing food, cutting sales tax rates, instituting earned income credits, raising personal exemptions and standard deductions, and relying more on income taxes, can also help reduce income inequality. (2000, 60 pp.; $12/free on web)
CLASP Publications, 1616 P Street, NW, Suite 150, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 328-5140/Fax: (202) 328-5195/Web: www.clasp.org/ E-mail: info@clasp.org

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Center News Briefs *(continued from page 9)*

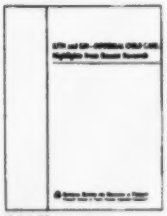
- **Katie McCaskie** joined NCCP to provide administrative and research support in the Social Science Research Unit after a year of teaching English in Costa Rica with Harvard University's World Teach. She has also worked at the Global Alliance for Women's Health; the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor; and on various documentary television and film productions. She is a graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, with a degree in anthropology

- NCCP added new research assistants for its long-term follow-up of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. **Clare McCarthy** received her Bachelor's degree in anthropology with a minor in child development from Tufts University where she also performed in children's theater in the Boston area and worked with the Fourth World Movement, an international organization dedicated to the eradication of poverty. **Aparna Sampat** has a Bachelor's degree in psychology and education from Swarthmore College where her studies focused primarily on the potential costs and benefits of school choice for inner-city Philadelphia children.

- **Katie MacLennan** is project coordinator for the Center's early childhood and family policy initiative. For her doctorate in clinical psychology at City University of New York, she is researching early childhood and mental health issues. Previously, in San Francisco, she taught preschoolers and worked on a two-year evaluation of a Haas Foundation initiative examining mental health services offered to low-income child care centers. Her Master's in applied psychology is from Teachers College, Columbia University, and her Bachelor's in psychology is from Mount Holyoke College.

- **Sharmila Lawrence** joined the Research Forum as program coordinator to manage the Packard Advocacy Initiative. The project disseminates research findings on welfare reform to advocates working to promote policies for low-income children and families. She has a Master's degree in international affairs from Columbia University. Most recently she was a consultant to the United Nations Development Fund for Women to assess effective strategies for changing public opinion on domestic violence in India, Kenya, and Peru. **Jennifer Farnsworth Francis**, formerly research assistant, is now the Research Forum research associate with primary responsibility for the Forum's Web site and database. A doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, her Bachelor's degree is from Bowdoin College with a double major in biology and sociology. She was previously a research assistant at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies.

NEW Publications Available from NCCP



$10.00

☐ **Kith and Kin—Informal Child Care: Highlights from Recent Research.** M. Brown-Lyons, A. Robertson, and J. Layzer of Abt Associates. Summarizes research about informal child care: the proportion of children using it and trends over time; characteristics of the families; why it is used; the costs; who the providers are; improving quality; and the experiences of providers, parents, and the children in care. Includes abstracts of 27 key documents in the field, methodological issues, and additional resources. *Research Highlights*. (May 2001). 96 pp.

☐ **Childhood Poverty Research Brief 3: Untapped Potential: State Earned Income Credits and Child Poverty Reduction.** N. G. Bennett and H. Lu. This new *Research Brief* looks at one of the most promising strategies to help the growing proportion of poor families that have working parents. It examines the current and potential impact of state earned income credits and shows that such credits could lift over 1 million children in working families from poverty. It also shows that the federal earned income tax credit now lifts approximately 2.5 million children out of poverty. (April 2001). 6 pp.

$5.00

FREE

☐ **Depression and Low-Income Women: Challenges for TANF and Welfare-to-Work Policies and Programs, Executive Summary.** M. Lennon, J. Blome, and K. English. Highlights findings from a review of the literature on the prevalence, treatment, and consequences of depression in low-income women, especially the relationship of depression to welfare and employment. Includes consequences for children, access to treatment, screening and assessment, and implications for research and policy. Full report and research citations are available at <www.researchforum.org>, the Web site of the NCCP Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism, as well as on NCCP's Web site. (April 2001). 6 pp.

FREE

☐ **Why Some Women Fail to Achieve Economic Security: Low Job Skills and Mental Health Problems are Key Barriers.** The August 2001 edition of the quarterly newsletter from the NCCP Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism describes the multiple barriers that a significant number of low-income women face in their search for employment and the inadequacy of services to ameliorate these barriers, drawing on findings from a longitudinal study of Michigan welfare recipients in an urban county in February 1997. The March issue described the diversity of welfare leavers and the role of sanctions in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. *the forum*. (August 2001). 4 pp.

☐ **Map and Track: State Initiatives for Young Children and Families, 2000 Edition.** N. K. Cauthen, J. Knitzer, and C. Ripple. This new edition in the *Map and Track* series highlights significant growth in state efforts to promote child development and family support and reveals that gains across the states have been very uneven. State efforts to promote family economic security also vary widely, demonstrating that the chances that young children and families will have their needs met depend on the state in which they live. Includes profiles of individual state efforts for young children and families for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. *Report*. (December 2000). 180 pp. *Highlights from Findings*. 24 pp.

$19.95 (for Full Report)
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